

Communications Audit

City of Grand Rapids

January 8, 2018

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Section 1: Executive Summary

Background

Grand Rapids is Michigan's second largest city. It's a city with a vibrant downtown, a dynamic business sector, diverse neighborhoods, an international art scene, world-class manufacturing, nationally recognized biomedical research and healthcare, innovative public transportation, spectacular outdoor attractions and a craft beer industry that has earned it the moniker Beer City USA.

It is also a city whose leadership has a clear vision for the 21st century, placing high value on community engagement, diversity and inclusion, public service, philanthropy, entrepreneurialism, education, sustainability, collaboration and transparency. The leadership has a track record of setting policies that deliver quality public services to residents while implementing sound fiscal policies.

These strategic steps have delivered impressive outcomes. Grand Rapids routinely receives national recognition as one of the best places in the country to raise a family, start a business or simply visit as a tourist destination.

By most accounts, Grand Rapids has a great story to tell.

Despite these positive attributes, the City has struggled to consistently and clearly communicate its achievements to residents and stakeholders. In 2014, the City hired a Director of Communications to improve external communications. While the addition of this position was an important start, the City still found that it was not effectively communicating with all target audiences.

In 2017, City Commissioners took additional steps to improve the City's overall communications performance. It hired Truscott Rossman, a strategic communications firm, to conduct an audit of existing communications practices, outline recommendations and deliver a comprehensive strategic communications plan to guide the City in the future.

This report presents the findings of the audit, as well as high level tactical recommendations and recommendations for a future communications staffing structure. The strategic plan will be developed after City leadership reviews and provides input on the audit.

Summary of Findings

Truscott Rossman embarked on a multi-faceted approach to perform this audit. Based on input from City Commissioners and administrators, we conducted internal meetings with department managers and city staff. We also spoke with external groups including local minority agencies; neighborhood, business and faith-based groups; philanthropic organizations and neighboring municipal partners. We conducted a review of recent media reports involving the City to assess what type of information is being published or broadcast to the public via news outlets. And, we conducted an extensive review of the City's digital media platforms.

We learned that while the City has made public commitments to improving its external communications, it has done so with little to no strategic direction. Communications at the administrative and departmental level have been well intended and, in some cases, strong. However, without strategic foundation, they lack coordination and are not as effective as they should be. Other key findings include:

- Communications can lack timeliness, relevance to the audience, content clarity, and present language barriers.
- Communications duties are frequently performed with little coordination, strategic oversight or awareness of branding protocols.
- The City has embarked on a significant upgrade to its digital presence, with a new website set to launch in late January 2018. This new, singular website should lay a strong foundation for a greatly improved digital presence; however, because the site is not fully launched and we did not have admin access to it, we were not able to conduct an audit on the new site. The research we *were* able to conduct on the City's soon-to-be retired website, as well as on a handful of departmental websites and multiple social media pages revealed that they are not managed in a strategic manner or curated in an organized way.

Summary of Recommendations

Our findings point to the need for several strategic actions. We will detail our recommendations later in this audit but two overarching recommendations warrant mentioning here.

Presently, the Director of Communications is not providing the full spectrum of strategic communications counsel and support. As a result, external communications lack strategic direction, and in some instances, messaging and timing are ineffective. We see the repositioning of a Managing Director of Communications as integral to establishing clear and consistent communications to city residents and stakeholders.

Furthermore, we recommend the establishment and staffing of a communications office to meet the various communications functions required of the City. This is largely a realignment of existing staff and functions into a single, strategically-driven office, but it does include some new hire recommendations.

These two recommendations, combined with a comprehensive strategic communications plan developed by Truscott Rossman, scheduled to be delivered in early 2018, will set in motion the steps necessary to better connect with your residents and other target audiences.

Section 2: Methodology

Our Work

Truscott Rossman first met with the City's executive leadership in August 2017 to discuss and determine the steps that should be taken to improve the City's overall strategic communications practices. Next, we conducted a series of one-on-one meetings in September 2017 with five of six City Commissioners and Mayor Rosalynn Bliss. Those meetings helped us identify strategic communications goals and deliverables for this project. With the executive leadership's support, we set out to perform a communications audit of the City's existing external communications practices, its processes, its brand consistency and its impact and relevancy with target audiences.

We then embarked on gathering information from City departments, community groups, digital/social media platforms and media outlets. Our research included meetings or interviews with:

- 15 city departments/offices that communicate frequently with external audiences. The executive office assisted in scheduling interviews with representatives of those departments.
- 15 community groups that receive regular communication from the City. The executive office and City Commissioners assisted in identifying some of these organizations.

The audit also included a comprehensive analysis of the City's digital platforms. This review included websites and social media accounts such as Facebook and Twitter.

Lastly, we conducted an analysis of media reports over a six-month timeframe in 2017. This information allowed us to compare how frequently media announcements distributed by the City generated news coverage, as well as assess responsive earned media reporting on city events or actions that did not originate with a media announcement from the City. These stories often involved the Grand Rapids Police and Fire Departments, community development projects, and neighborhood issues and events.

The research conducted in these areas provided the quantitative and qualitative information included this audit.

Section 3: Field Work

City Department Meetings

Between October 23 and November 13, 2017, Truscott Rossman held 17 meetings with representatives of 15 City of Grand Rapids departments/offices to discuss current communications practices and protocols, as well as communications challenges and opportunities.

Departments that communicate most frequently with external audiences were selected to participate in these meetings. Department meetings typically included the director and select staff members most directly engaged in external communication. Department heads determined who would attend the meetings.

A list of departmental meetings follows.

- Communications (City of GR & GRPD): Steve Guitar, Director
- Customer Service 311 / City of GR Website: Becky Jo Glover, Director of Customer Service
- GRFD: Chief John Lehman; Bill Smith, Public Information Officer, inspector; and Dawn Kulak, Financial Administrative Coordinator
- GRPD: Chief David Rahinsky
- GRPD: Terry Dixon, former Public Information Officer, Shift Commander; and Cathy Williams, Public Information Officer
- Human Resources: Mari Beth Jelks, Managing Director of Administrative Services; Patti Caudill, Diversity and Inclusion Manager; and full management team

- Mobility GR (parking, DASH, pedestrian & cycling planning/facilities): Josh Naramore, Director; Jennifer Kasper, business office (works with business customers); Amanda Moore, Administrative Analyst
- Neighborhood Coordination: Stacy Stout, Assistant to the City Manager
- Office of Cable Television Administration: Travis Scott, Cable TV Administrator
- Office of Special Events: Evette Pittman, Supervisor, and Kayleigh Kramer, Administrative Assistant Coordinator
- Our Community's Children: Lynn Heemstra, Executive Director
- Parks, Recreation & Forestry: David Marquardt, Director; Laura Cleypool, Business Manager; Catherine Zietse, Planning and Community Relations (temp); Sawyer Johnson, Marketing & Communications Support (intern)
- Planning: Suzanne Schulz, Director
- Planning/Community Engagement/Graphic Design: Jay Steffen, Assistant Planning Director; Layla Aslani, Administrative Analyst; Michael Moore, Visual Communications
- Public Services (street maintenance; refuse/recycling): James Hurt, Director
- Traffic Safety: Chris Zull, Director, and John Bartlett, Traffic System Engineer
- Water: Izamar Contreras-Alvarado, Administrative Aide; Sam Giffel, Business Manager; and Latoya Black, Administrative Services Officer

Community Group Interviews

We interviewed representatives from 15 community organizations and Kent County to learn what type of communications these agencies receive from the City, how they distribute it to their residents or constituents, what distribution tactics they recommend the City use to reach residents,

and what these organizations suggest the City do to strengthen and improve its communications practices.

We conducted interviews with the following organizations:

- Southtown Corridor Improvement District
- Westside Corridor Improvement District
- Uptown Corridor Improvement District
- Eastown Community Association
- Garfield Park Neighborhood Association
- West Grand Neighborhood Association
- Northeast Citizens Action Neighborhood Association
- Neighbors of Belknap Lookout
- Oakdale Park Church / G-Rap member
- Grace Christian Reformed Church / G-Rap member
- Brown Hutcherson Ministries
- Urban Core Collective
- Hispanic Center of West Michigan
- Grand Rapids Community Foundation
- Steelcase Foundation
- Kent County Communications Department

Earned Media Analysis

One of the most effective tools available to the City in its effort to communicate with its target audiences is the local news media. Earned media content, also known as news coverage, reaches thousands of residents and stakeholders each day. While news content produced by independent media outlets is not solely under the control of the City, the content can provide a level of credibility with the audience if the media is well-informed by the communications office. It can also provide greater frequency of messaging through repeated news stories, and if widely distributed, it can reach a diverse audience.

Consequently, it is important to review media coverage to understand what type of content media outlets find compelling. With that in mind we analyzed content and frequency of proactive and responsive media communications between June and December 2017, and compared that to resulting media coverage. Specifically, we monitored:

- Grand Rapids area print and digital media outlets
- Grand Rapids area television media outlets
- Grand Rapids area radio media outlets
- Statewide media outlets
- National media outlets

We tabulated the story count, analyzed the sentiment (positive, neutral or negative) of the news coverage and measured the frequency in which the City's messaging was presented in news reports.

Additionally, we looked at the method and format used during the distribution of proactive news releases and alerts from the City for a one-month period between November 15 and December 14, 2017 and where those announcements were sent.

Digital Media Analysis

Typically, a digital media audit would include a comprehensive audit of an organization's website. However, because the current City of Grand Rapids' website is due to be decommissioned, and the new site is currently under construction, we were not able to conduct a meaningful audit of the site at this time. We do see value in conducting an audit of the website once it is formally launched.

As part of our efforts, Truscott Rossman audited the City of Grand Rapids' social media accounts along two related tracks: quantitative and qualitative. The quantitative and qualitative audits assessed the City's (and related entities) digital presence in a 180-day (6-month) window spanning June 15 to December 11.

The *quantitative audit* captures the performance of each social media account.

The *qualitative audit* assesses the City's overall usage of social media platforms, including the content of posts. For example, rather than looking at how many engagements a post received, the qualitative audit focuses on how that post was structured and whether the content is optimized for social media. In short, is the platform and account in question being used correctly?

The following codes are used for each entity audited:

- City of Grand Rapids (CGR)
- Police Department (CGRPD)
- Police Department Recruiting (CGRPDR)
- Fire Department (CGRFD)
- Parks and Recreation (CGRPR)
- Rosa Parks Circle Ice Rink (CGRRPC)
- My GR City Points (CGRPOINTS)
- Environmental Services Department (CGRESD)
- Our Community's Children (CGROCC)
- Indian Trails Golf Course (CGRITGC)
- Development Center (CGRDC)
- Mobile GR and Parking Services (CGRPS)
- Office of Diversity and Inclusion (CGRODI)
- Water Department (CGRWD)
- Office of Special Events (CGROSE)
- Community Relations Commission (CGRCRC)

Several accounts were *not* included in the audit for the reasons included below:

- Grand Rapids 311 (Twitter): We were informed that this account is being shut down.
- Garfield Park Community Gym (Facebook): We were informed that this account is being shut down.
- Mobile GR and Parking Services (Twitter and Instagram): These accounts have not been formally launched and there is limited data. However, we were able to audit the Facebook page.
- City of Grand Rapids Planning Department (Facebook): Access to this Facebook page was not granted and it hasn't posted since 2012.
- GovernGR: Access to this Facebook page was not granted and it hasn't posted since July.
- ALPACT West Michigan: This account is no longer active.
- Grand Rapids Parks Director (Twitter, Instagram): Access to the Grand Rapids Parks Director Twitter and Instagram accounts was denied by the director because they weren't, in his opinion, "city" accounts and wouldn't be of value.

Section 4: Audit Findings, Challenges and Opportunities

General Departmental Practices and Protocols

FINDINGS

All departmental personnel interviewed expressed a strong desire to effectively communicate with residents, businesses, community and neighborhood organizations and other key audiences. Without exception, they consider clear, consistent communications to be a priority. All had a good understanding of who they need to reach and the kinds of vital information that should be shared.

However, we found little to no coordination among departments and no central oversight for external communications. While some support services exist – including graphic design, community engagement and A-V production – protocols for requesting and scheduling the services are not codified and staff members providing the services are stretched beyond capacity. In other words, departments are largely on their own when it comes to proactive external communications – with the exception of media relations.

311 also provides external communications support to City departments in the form of contracted customer service. While it is not within our scope to audit the customer service function, it's important to note that coordinated communication between City departments, City communications staff and 311 is vitally important. 311 has established two protocols to improve coordination between City departments and the 311 team:

1. Call Scripts - Departments are responsible for providing 311 operator scripts related to current departmental activities, programs and initiatives. These scripts allow 311 operators to answer most questions and cut down on the number of referrals operators need to make to respective departments. Departments value and comply with this protocol.
2. News Release Review - All news releases/advisories are to be routed through 311 prior to distribution to media. This allows the department to prepare for calls that may be stimulated by media coverage.

In an attempt to space out media announcements and, thereby, manage the flow of incoming calls, 311 occasionally attempts to advise departments on the timing of releases. However, several departmental interviewees noted that they don't always have flexibility in timing of announcements, and scheduling these releases should not be determined by 311.

Departmental staff use a wide variety of tools to get their messages out, including:

- Digital (social media and website)
- Email
- E-newsletters
- Community relations (i.e., meetings, surveys, listening sessions, events, partnerships)
- Print materials (i.e., brochures, flyers, reports)
- Media announcements (i.e., alerts, advisories, releases, news conferences)

Examples of Proficiency

Communications proficiency varies among departments. Some stood out as highly proficient in communicating with their key publics. We have provided some examples here.

For instance, the Planning Department has implemented a highly sophisticated community engagement strategy that clearly defines actions required to inform and engage the public to varying degrees, depending on the type of project. Please see [Appendix A](#) for a detailed outline of Planning Department community engagement tools and applications.

The Parks and Recreation Department has established a strong multi-platform marketing and communications strategy, combining engaging social media content, email marketing, media announcements, cross-promotions with outside partners such as Experience Grand Rapids, and a well-planned community engagement strategy.

The Parks and Recreation team has also been highly attentive to brand standards, even creating their own brand standards manual that incorporates the logo standards developed by the City's graphic designer and the City website voice/tone recommendations from Mighty in the Midwest, the City's web development firm.

Please see [Appendix B](#) for samples of these Parks and Recreation materials.

Our Community's Children is another department that has effectively used multiple platforms and partnerships to communicate and build relationships. These include a quarterly ELO Network newsletter, departmental and program-specific social media pages (although engagement on these pages is low), media relations (news releases and news conferences), partnerships with community organizations and other City departments, community meetings and events, professionally designed print materials and an annual report.

The department also operates three websites (OCC, ELO and T2CStudio). Content on the sites is fresh and the sites are very easy to navigate. However, department staff acknowledge the sites should be consolidated. They are struggling with the best way to do this under the umbrella of "Our Community's Children," and they could use guidance. The websites also lack clear City of Grand Rapids branding. We would support the department's recommendation to consolidate the three sites and could provide further direction in a strategic communications plan.

CHALLENGES

The examples outlined above are cited to demonstrate that there are some strong communications practices in place throughout the City's operations, and some protocols – while inconsistently followed – to guide interdepartmental collaboration.

However, without a dedicated communications team leading strategy, providing the necessary tactical support, and designing clear and well-integrated protocols for interdepartmental collaboration, City-wide communications will remain disjointed.

Far and away the most common communications challenges cited by representatives of multiple departments were:

Staffing/Resources

- Lack of City resources committed to City-wide communications and, by extension, in support of departmental communications.
- Over-extended City communications staff – many staff members noted that it is impossible for one person to effectively handle all communications for a city the size of Grand Rapids. Without staff, the Director is limited in his strategic and tactical capabilities.
- Absence of unified communications leadership. As one department head put it, “You have to shape what you want to accomplish. It takes a strong leader and everyone needs to know what you want to accomplish and help change the trajectory – how can we contribute to that? We need a clear path. That’s how you unify the organization.”

Standards/Protocols

- Lack of complete set of brand standards.
- Lack of formalized, shared communications protocols.
- Lack of protocols for and training in digital media. Digital media at the City is described by some as “the wild, wild West” and by others this way – “we suck at digital media.”
- City intranet is cumbersome and not widely used.
- No internal Master Calendar of events/announcements.
- Departments don’t always have the flexibility to reschedule media announcements based on 311 workload.

In summary, while all departments want to communicate clearly and effectively with their constituents, they feel ill-equipped to do so.

OPPORTUNITIES

We have outlined opportunities to address these challenges in the following Community Relations, Media Relations, Digital Media, Cable TV & A-V, and Branding & Design sections. We have also provided a summary of high-level recommendations in Section 5 of this report.

Specific strategies and tactics to address these challenges will be more thoroughly defined in the upcoming City of Grand Rapids Strategic Communications Plan.

Community Relations

FINDINGS

Community relations functions are currently splintered across multiple departments.

We identified nine City staff members who handle community relations functions on a fulltime basis. They include the community engagement team currently located in the Planning Department (2 permanent FTEs and 2 temporary FTEs), as well as the Assistant to the City Manager for Neighborhood Coordination, plus the four-member Neighborhood Connectors support team.

Additionally, the Director of Communications has some responsibility for organizing community relations activities – particularly on behalf of GRPD. Finally, Human Resources – including the Office of Diversity and Inclusion – is also called upon to assist with community relations initiatives, such as planning and moderating listening sessions related to community-police relations.

The role of the Community Engagement Team housed in the Planning Department is to assist Planning and other departments with community relations in support of various projects and initiatives. Departmental clients and initiatives include:

- Planning
- Engineering/Road Construction
- Development – Urban Core Collective

- Mobile GR – Bike Share and other programs
- Age-Friendly Communities

The Community Engagement Team within the Planning Department has developed a comprehensive community engagement map to guide community outreach on behalf of various City departments. Please see [Appendix C](#).

The team estimates that approximately 50 percent of their time is dedicated to Planning projects and 50 percent is shared among other departments. They charge back services if contracted by an Enterprise Fund department; but not for general fund departments.

Additionally, the role of the Assistant to the City Manager - Neighborhood Coordinator is to empower residents to get engaged and have a voice in City government, development projects and community initiatives. Her grant-funded team reaches residents through events, training seminars, social media platforms, flyers, partnerships with neighborhood associations, meetings, and media announcements.

Our community-based interviews provided additional insights into community relations. Individuals we spoke with indicated they receive a varying amount of content from the City. They provided insight into the ways they distribute content to their various communities and constituents, the mediums they use to redistribute information based on available resources and the manner in which their residents consume information. They indicated the information is:

- Posted to organizational websites and social media sites;
- Redistributed via email blast to the organization's database;
- Printed in newsletters and flyers that are distributed to area businesses or homes;
- Published in church or community bulletins;
- And, presented verbally at organizational meetings, faith services and one-on-one encounters.

CHALLENGES

Departmental interviews and analysis revealed that the primary challenge with community relations is structural: community relations staff and activities are siloed and disconnected from each other and from other communications functions.

Another specific challenge cited by community engagement staff was reaching and engaging low income neighborhoods and/or non-English speakers. These neighborhoods often lack formal neighborhood associations, and people within these communities often mistrust or fear government officials.

From the outside looking in, most community organizations found value in some of the information and appreciated the City's efforts, but expressed these challenges:

- Information is delivered without a schedule and in an inconsistent way.
- It frequently involves announcements already made or actions already taken.
- It frequently does not provide enough advance notice of upcoming meetings relevant to community developments or policy changes in which community input is desired.
- It is written in a bureaucratic style that is difficult for residents to understand.
- It is not provided in Spanish, causing a delay in translation and redistribution to some city populations.

OPPORTUNITIES

Through the Neighborhood Connectors program and the Grand Rapids Neighborhood Summit, the Assistant to the City Manager – Neighborhood Coordinator is working to overcome the challenges related to lack of trust among low-income and non-English speaking residents, as well as inconsistencies in neighborhood organization. Additionally, the City Manager and Deputy City Manager have been meeting regularly with the Urban Core Collective. These efforts have been well received and should continue.

The Assistant to the City Manager – Neighborhood Coordinator also expressed a need to develop a communications plan to support the Neighborhood Connectors program. As part of this plan, she pointed to the need to use both high tech and *high touch* tactics to directly reach residents, including tactics like hand delivering flyers to neighborhood barber shops, churches and community centers. While this level of community relations can put a strain on resources, this office recently hired four support staff members and should draw on these individuals to assist in carrying out the high touch tactics needed to reach more marginalized residents.

The City also has an opportunity to better coordinate and leverage community relations activities by consolidating the functions currently housed in the Planning Department within an Office of Communications. While we would ordinarily recommend that the Neighborhood Coordinator and team of Neighborhood Connectors be included in this realignment, we recognize the challenges this would pose given the terms of the grant that funds their activities. Please see the complete set of staffing structure recommendations and rationale for these recommendations in Section 5 of this report.

Additionally, while all ideas offered by community organizations were valuable, a handful of the ideas surfaced repeatedly during our interviews. Several of them require strategic planning to implement while others may require limited resource commitments. The key takeaways and possible action items include:

- Issue all City communications in English and Spanish.
- Provide two weeks advance notice to community organizations/residents of meetings and other community engagement opportunities.
- Reduce volume of individual announcements of administrative news; increase the volume of community development news.
- Develop a monthly newsletter and calendar summarizing administrative announcements while also looking ahead to future City meetings and community events.
- Engage with minority media outlets; post community development content once a month.
- Include philanthropic foundations in the distribution of relevant city information.

- Conduct biannual update meetings with community philanthropic leaders to update these organizations on past and future projects.
- Conduct biannual in-person meetings hosted by City Commissioners and City staff at key community organizations.
- Develop an interactive mobile application (app) for all City-wide information.
- Consider setting up City information walk-in centers in neighborhoods.

Earned Media / Media Relations

FINDINGS

The City's Director of Communications has primary responsibility for initiating communication with the media on behalf of the executive office and various City departments and for fielding initial media inquiries on behalf of the City. This includes distribution of all City-related news releases, advisories and alerts.

Depending on the circumstances, the Director of Communications will either provide information directly to fulfill incoming media requests or will coordinate interviews with or assist in the distribution of statements from City leaders or department personnel.

The Director of Communications may also work with City leadership to develop statements or talking points on sensitive issues or significant initiatives involving the City executive office or elected officials; however, this role has increasingly been filled by the Assistant to the Mayor and an Assistant to the City Manager.

Additionally, the Grand Rapids Police Department and Grand Rapids Fire Department each employ Public Information Officers. The GRPD PIO is responsible, primarily for responsive and on-scene, "breaking news" media relations. Most proactive media communications coming out of GRPD runs through the Director of Communications. Similarly, the GRFD PIO handles on-scene and responsive media communications, but is also engaged in more proactive communication with residents, targeted neighborhoods and community partners.

The City of Grand Rapids communicates with the media in a wide variety of ways. Media communications are both proactive and responsive. Proactive communications include prepared news releases, media advisories and alerts, news conferences and interview/photo opportunities, emails and phone calls. Responsive communications typically include emails, phone calls, prepared statements and in-person encounters at City meetings and events.

Proactive media communications are conducted to announce City Commission decisions and other outcomes of City Commission meetings, to share information or announce programs or initiatives on behalf of the executive office, and to share information and send alerts on behalf of individual departments.

City Commission announcements are formally requested by the City Manager following Commission meetings or actions. The City Manager provides relevant information to the Director of Communications who prepares and distributes releases or other alerts to the media, upon approval by the City Manager.

Executive office media relations requests generally flow through the City Manager or Deputy City Manager to the Director of Communications and must be approved by executive leadership.

From June to December 2017, the Communications Director distributed approximately 47 news releases, advisories and alerts (however, this does not account for time sensitive distribution of information – for example announcements of meeting dates – which was not available for analysis).

Proactive Media Relations Coverage Analysis

News releases and advisories were sent to a comprehensive list of local media outlets and community publications, as well as a list of community advocacy and service organizations, neighborhood associations and other interested community groups.

In a review of news release and advisory distribution for the one-month period between November 15 and December 14, we found that releases are typically distributed in an email blast, with the subject line pertaining to the content of the release, and a one- to three-paragraph synopsis of the information contained in the release. See [Appendix D](#) for reference. On average, three attachments are included with the emails, usually consisting of the release/advisory in two file

formats and a photo. Eight of the nine email distributions were sent out after 10AM – often late in the afternoon.

Of the 47 releases, advisories and alerts distributed and posted to the City of Grand Rapids website between June-December 2017, 30 received local, regional and/or national media coverage that could be tracked via monitoring services and organic news searches. Seventeen of the distributed releases received no traceable media coverage. The table below provides an overview of the overall sentiment of the coverage received as a result of the 30 releases, advisories and alerts that garnered media coverage. Refer to [Appendix E](#) for a full analysis.

Overall Earned/Proactive Media Coverage:

Type of Announcement	# of Stories	Story Sentiment			# of Stories Featuring City Comment
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	
City Releases/ Alerts					
30	294	24	261	9	80

The 30 proactive distributions that were picked up generated 294 stories (including syndicated coverage) published by local, regional and national media. The overwhelming majority of coverage was neutral in tone and reported on the facts, and 80 of the stories included comment, quote, or written statement from individuals at the City.

Furthermore, releases distributed by City communications personnel fell within eight broadly defined categories, including: community relations, parks/environment, Grand Rapids Police Department, Grand Rapids Fire Department, City job appointments, development, housing, and miscellaneous city services. In the analysis of the coverage, found in [Appendix E](#), the majority of

proactive distribution covered by media were about community relations (42 percent) and the Grand Rapids Police Department (26 percent).

Responsive (Reactive) Media Coverage Analysis

During the same June-December 2017 timeframe, 566 stories (including syndications) were published about the City of Grand Rapids, independent of releases and alerts distributed by City communications personnel. The 566 stories were generated from instances of crisis events, or general stories independent of a news release.

Overall Earned/Responsive Media Coverage:

Type of Coverage	# of Stories	Story Sentiment			# of Stories Featuring City Response
		Positive	Neutral	Negative	
Breaking News and Crisis Coverage	493	0	43	450	52
General Coverage	73	10	59	4	40

Of the responsive media coverage, 493 stories (including syndications) were published as a result of a crisis event within the City, often breaking news. Examples of these types of stories included the GRPD recorded telephone line, inappropriate use of force by a GRPD officer, other public safety or public agency activities, administrative issues such as affordable housing and community development. See [Appendix F](#) for a full overview of the crisis and general media coverage.

Stories of a breaking news or crisis nature accounted for 87 percent of the total responsive media coverage. Sixteen percent of the stories featured comment from the City. The findings from this media search indicate that during 2017, the media actively sought out stories regarding community relations, the Grand Rapids Police Department, affordable housing, and economic development.

Based on these numbers, 34 percent of the media coverage between June-December 2017 was driven by planned media announcements from the City. City official comments were included in 28 percent of those stories.

Conversely, 66 percent of the stories between June-December 2017 were the result of unplanned news coverage, and only about 15 percent of those stories included comment from the City. This highlights the need for more strategic responsive messaging practices that should improve the public's understanding of City actions, and the public's overall perception of City operations.

CHALLENGES

Our review uncovered the following challenges:

- There is currently no clear system in place to prioritize the distribution of news releases, announcements and alerts. In some cases, 311 attempts to dictate timing of releases based on current City activities that are likely to generate incoming calls – this can pose a challenge for departments attempting to communicate timely information.
- The majority of media coverage about the City (66 percent) is the result of enterprise reporting by news outlets and is not driven by proactive messaging by the City. This means the City is not setting the narrative in its mass media messaging.
- The frequency of enterprise reporting by local media outlets creates a constant need for responsive messaging from the City to ensure its position is clearly represented. Right now, there is not enough staff to meet this demand.
- The Police and Fire Departments operate somewhat autonomously on topics related to their specific services or programs.

- Relationships between the City and key media outlets are inconsistent. Some departments and City staff members have more active engagement with media while others have little interaction. This leads to uncertainty on the part of the media as to who to contact for information.

OPPORTUNITIES

The media relations and earned media analysis conducted by our firm provided several key findings. While it is too early to recommend specific actions, we see several opportunities for improvement that would likely be spelled out in detail in our strategic communications plan. Some of those opportunities include:

- Establishing a stronger communications office structure – one that is strategic and forward-looking. This would include the creation of a Media Relations Manager position within the communications office.
- Developing a shared Master Content Calendar to prioritize the distribution of all earned media materials by the City. The goal is to ensure that announcements are not overlooked by media, create a cadence in the timeliness of distribution, and keep all departments aligned with announcements coming from other departments.
- Refining the information distribution process and establishing unified protocols for all departments to follow under the guidance of the City's Managing Director of Communications.
- Expand proactive messaging opportunities for the PIOs in the GRPD and GRFD.
- Adjusting its procedures to provide more responsive messaging on enterprise stories involving community issues, breaking news or crisis-related topics generated by the media.
- Scheduling regular media briefings to provide background information and strengthen its relationships with key media personnel in the Grand Rapids market.

Specific strategies and tactics to address the challenges outline will be more thoroughly defined in the upcoming City of Grand Rapids Strategic Communications Plan.

Digital Media

FINDINGS

Quantitative Audit

We pulled Facebook Like and Ratings data from 15 cities of similar size from around the United States to compare against CGR's main Facebook page. Data is provided in the table below.

City	Population	Likes	Rating
Grand Rapids, MI	193,780	14,426	N/A
Mobile, AL	191,544	21,924	N/A
Irvine, CA	186,852	14,350	N/A
Boise City, ID	193,161	13,975	2.2
Arlington, VA	195,965	12,616	4.4
Knoxville, TN	180,277	11,705	N/A
Tacoma, WA	195,898	11,551	N/A
Spokane, WA	196,818	9,523	N/A
Columbus, OH	185,571	6,777	2.3
Oxnard, CA	183,628	6,756	N/A
Amarillo, TX	183,021	4,775	N/A
Des Moines, IA	194,163	4,109	N/A
San Bernardino, CA	198,550	3,015	2.2
Richmond, VA	193,777	1,054	N/A
Little Rock, AR	184,564	593	N/A

This data shows that the City of Grand Rapid's primary Facebook page is at the upper end for number of likes as compared to cities with similar population sizes.

Before we go any deeper, it's important to have a good understanding of some of the terms and metrics we've included in the audit. All performance metrics are "daily" unless noted otherwise:

- **Engagement Rate:** The total number of engagements divided by reach on Facebook. For Twitter, this is the total number of engagements divided by impressions. On Instagram, this is the average daily engagements divided by the average daily impressions. *This is the key performance metric.*
- **Frequency:** The average number of posts (or Tweets, etc.) per day.
- **Impressions:** How many times your content was seen.
- **Reach:** How many people saw your content (specific to Facebook).
- **Engaged Users:** Number of people that engaged with your content of any kind (specific to Facebook).
- **Engagement by Post Type:** Number of people that engaged with your content broken down by type (specific to Facebook).
- **People Talking About This (PTAT):** The number of people who have created a story from your Page post. Stories include: When someone Likes your page. Sharing, liking or commenting on your post (specific to Facebook).
- **Reactions:** The number of Facebook Likes, Loves, Hahas, Wows, Sads and Angrys a post /page receives.
- **Response Rate and Time:** The percentage of new messages that your Page sends an initial response to on the day they are received. Response time is the average time it takes your Page to send initial responses to new messages in one day.
- **Rating:** The star rating a Facebook page has received by users if shown to users (specific to Facebook).

Again, all performance metrics below are “daily” unless noted otherwise and the tables included below are sorted by Likes/Followers from highest to lowest.

Facebook

	Likes	Frequency	Reach	Engagement Rate	Response
CGRPD	40,066	1.28	12,785.88	12.22%	100%; 1-hour
CGR	14,426	2.77	6,506.25	5.55%	N/A
CGRFD	4,661	1.42	3,837.31	8.50%	N/A
CGRPR	4,007	1.23	4,598.24	2.36%	79%; 5-hour
CGRRPC	3,570	.019	1,096.05	8.69%	93%; 1-hour
CGRPDR	3,061	.022	152.12	6.61%	89%; 4-day
CGRPOINTS	2,293	.02	11.71	4.78%	100%; 2-day
CGRES	1,719	.21	387.45	6.20%	70%; 18-hour
CGROCC	1,273	.205	105.39	3.99%	Within a day
CGRITGC	972	1.18	835.04	4.14%	82%; 16-hour
CGRDC	683	.37	904.3	8.23%	100%; 10-hour
CGRPS	312	.13	49.55	4.94%	88%; 1-day
CGRODI	270	.29	34.21	5.26%	N/A
CGRWD	229	.055	16.21	9.93%	50%; 1-minute
CGROSE	188	1.177	190.46	6.58%	100%; 1-hour
CGRCRC	157	1.55	16.52	6.11%	N/A

Twitter

	Followers	Frequency	Impressions	Engagements	Engagement Rate
CGR	15,269	4.43	5,203.97	71.42	1.37%
CGRPD	5,304	.77	2,155.18	96.33	4.46%

Instagram

	Followers	Frequency	Impressions	Reach	Engagements	Engagement Rate
CGR	865	.244	118.62	89.52	9.86	8.31%
CGRES	711	.15	57.54	42.38	7.21	12.53%

Overall Conclusion: From a quantitative perspective, the Grand Rapids Police Department is the best performing social media presence.

You can find the detailed master quantitative report in [Appendix G-1](#).

You can find all the supporting data for Facebook and Twitter in [Appendix G-2](#).

Qualitative Audit

Included below is the qualitative audit of each department, office and entity's social media accounts(s). Truscott Rossman conducted the qualitative audit over the same timespan as the quantitative audit: June 15 to December 11. For the purposes of this document, we've opted to include it as a table broken down by social media platform.

To conduct this aspect of our digital audit, we asked the following questions of each social media account (again, broken down by platform). Simply put, a YES answer is preferred; a NO answer is not. However, a "NO" doesn't constitute failure; it simply means we found examples of the "not preferred" behavior. Qualitative audits, by their nature, are subjective. Ultimately, this information will be used to inform the recommended trainings and style guides included later in this document.

1. Facebook

- a. Is there a comment policy?
- b. Are they removing links in posts after they've "attached"?
- c. Are they using images that have limited text?
- d. Are they using high-quality images?
- e. Are they providing enough context/lede text in posts?
- f. Are they responding to questions left in the comments?
- g. Are they tagging relevant pages, groups and events?
- h. Are they refraining from engaging with their own content as the page?
- i. Are they limiting/not posting text-only status updates?
- j. Are they allowing the link to attach?
- k. Are they generating unique content?

2. Twitter

- a. Are they using a URL shortener?
- b. Are they using images that have limited text?
- c. Are they using high-quality images?
- d. Are they tagging relevant accounts?
- e. Are they limiting/not posting text-only Tweets?
- f. Are they responding to questions from citizens/users?

3. Instagram

- a. Are they using high-quality images?

- b. Are they refraining from including links in posts?
- c. Are they tagging relevant accounts?

Facebook

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
CGRPD	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES
CGR	YES	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES
CGRFD	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
CGRPR	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRRPC	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRPDR	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRPOINTS	NO	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	NO
CGRES	YES	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGROCC	NO	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES
CGRITGC	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	NO	YES
CGRDC	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRPS	NO	YES	NO	YES	YES	N/A	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRODI	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
CGRWD	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO	N/A	N/A	YES	NO	YES	YES
CGROSE	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	YES	YES	NO	NO	YES	YES
CGRCRC	NO	YES	YES	NO	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	NO

Twitter

	A	B	C	D	E	F
CGR	NO	NO	NO	NO	YES	NO
CGRPD	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Instagram

	A	B	C
CGRPR	YES	YES	YES
CGRES	NO	NO	YES

Overall Conclusion: From a purely qualitative standpoint, CGRPR (Parks and Recreation) is the City of Grand Rapids' best run social media account.

The City of Grand Rapids' qualitative audit includes in-depth descriptions along with examples. These descriptions also apply to and should be referenced for the remaining department, office and entity qualitative audits. Additional examples are provided in unique situations.

You can find the full, detailed qualitative report in [Appendix H](#).

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The primary challenge to bringing the City's social media presence to the next level is twofold:

1. No single individual is tracking results and ensuring posts are crafted according to best practices, and
2. There is no centralized website that staff can access and publish relevant content for sharing on social media. It's our understanding that this will be rectified when the new City website is launched in late January, provided the appropriate staff members are granted access and can update content.

It is important for the successful implementation of the digital communications strategy that only one website be live and promoted, serving as the central clearinghouse for all of the City of Grand Rapids' digital properties. In other words, it would not be our recommendation to have both sites live simultaneously (as is currently the case). To do so, is confusing for the end user and challenging for people tasked with administering social media accounts.

In fact, as is indicated in [Appendix H](#) and under the qualitative audit included above, one of the most common challenges was the inability of a social media manager to link to a news release or related content on the website. In numerous cases, this led to them using low-quality screenshots of Facebook posts or other PDFs, instead of what should be a mobile friendly and easily accessible landing page.

Following that, a prominent secondary challenge is the fact that page administrators don't have ready access to a graphic designer to ensure images are developed according to best practices for distribution across platforms. The City can address this by properly resourcing the Office of Communications with graphic design support.

Finally, coordination is a challenge. Much of the content can and should be cross-posted between accounts. In some cases, admins are doing it. In others, they are not. The recommendation related to a Master Content Calendar included below will help resolve this challenge. (See Recommendations in Section 5.)

Cable TV and A-V

FINDINGS

The Office of Cable TV Administration is focused, primarily, on the City's Cable TV station – Grand Rapids Information Network (GRIN). This channel is the government leg of local PEG broadcasting, with the other two partners being GRCC/GRPS operating the education channel and Community Media Center operating the public/community access channel.

GRIN is carried through all local cable providers as part of their local service agreements.

GRIN produces and airs a small amount of original content including:

- City Commission meeting coverage
- Planning Commission meeting coverage
- *Platica* and *La Cuidad* – Spanish language programming hosted by Tom Almante
- Special City meetings, such as Mayor's State of the City Address and GR Police Policies & Procedures Review Task Force public meeting
- City leadership vlogs (Mayor, City Manager and Police Chief)
- Videos produced for City departments

In addition to original content, GRIN airs Michigan State Senate sessions, NASA long form videos, Michigan Public Broadcasters PSAs, and other public access programming. The channel does not air political content.

The City does not actively market the channel or its programming, and the Cable TV Administrator is not aware of any City buildings where it regularly airs for visitors.

Additionally, the Office of Cable TV Administration has been called upon by various departments to assist in video production and live streaming. These requests have increased in recent years and include recording or live streaming a variety of content from lengthy after-hour meetings to video blogs to educational videos to brief scripted and narrated videos promoting specific City services, amenities or events.

The Office accommodates departmental requests as follows:

- If Office staff currently has time/capacity.
- If the requesting department agrees to allow the Office to air the content on GRIN (while occasional exceptions are made, this requirement serves to filter out excessive requests).
- If the Office has the equipment to handle the request.

If requests can be accommodated, the requesting department is responsible for scripting, securing a location and securing a narrator. Office of Cable TV personnel will assist with production advice and handle all shooting and editing.

Departments use the videos on their Facebook pages and YouTube channels, and they are typically repurposed on the City's social media platforms.

In some instances, such as when the Planning Department wanted to live-stream Planning Commission meetings, the Office of Cable TV has simply provided guidance in the use of the department's existing equipment to get the job done.

CHALLENGES

The Office administrator noted that the City is not adequately resourced to livestream longer off-site meetings and programs. For anything over 30 minutes, he advises use of the proper audio/video equipment, including two to three cameras with multiple operators in order to heighten

production values. He notes this is a “brand” issue – the City is currently making do with inadequate equipment, so production values suffer.

He also cited limited capacity to accommodate all departmental A-V production requests, despite having temporary staff assigned to his office.

OPPORTUNITIES

The City has an opportunity to better coordinate with other communications functions and better leverage Cable TV and A-V services by consolidating these functions within the Office of Communications. We also see tremendous opportunity in formalizing and expanding A-V production services for departments. Please see the complete set of staffing structure recommendations and rationale for these recommendations in Section 5 of this report.

Additionally, to meet the changing demands of the public, as well as the executive office and various City departments, the administrator has put in a request for an A-V package that would allow for high quality livestreaming on Facebook. If that purchase is approved, the Office of Cable TV personnel could better serve the needs of the executive office and other departments in livestreaming Commission Night Out, Planning Commission meetings, public information meetings and other events. Video captured at those meetings could then be uploaded and edited to air on GRIN.

Branding and Design

FINDINGS

Brand Standards and Protocols

In 2016, the graphic designer in the planning department completed a set of brand standards related to the City of Grand Rapids logo usage and colors. These standards were shared electronically with City departments. See [Appendix I](#) for these standards.

While the standards provide clear guidance on logo usage, there are no clear protocols in place to ensure compliance. Discussions with City department personnel and a review of a sampling of

departmental communications suggests that an effort is being made to adhere to logo usage guidelines; however, standard usage isn't universal.

No further work has been done on a City of Grand Rapids Brand Standards Manual since the initial logo work in 2016.

However, Mighty in the Midwest, the contracted web developer assisting with the new City of Grand Rapids website, has produced brand voice/tone standards and writing style guidelines for web content. Additionally, the web development team has implemented standards from the "Hemingway Manual" to ensure readability of content on the new website. See [Appendix J](#) for these website guideline and standards documents.

These guidelines have been shared with some departments; however, it's unclear how broadly they have been shared and how they are to be applied beyond the website – if at all.

Some departments expressed confusion about intended application of these writing style and brand voice/tone guidelines, stating that they think they are supposed to be used to guide voice and tone of *all* communications pieces, not only the website.

In fact, the Parks & Recreation Department has developed its own Brand Standards Manual using the logo standards developed by the City's graphic designer and the website voice/tone guidelines developed by Mighty in the Midwest. See [Appendix B-3](#) for this manual.

Graphic Design

Currently, the City employs one graphic designer in the Planning Department. This person is part of the Community Engagement team and provides graphic design services for the Planning Department as well as for other City departments, upon request. Services include:

- Web graphics
- Print media design
- Photography

- Signage

Approximately 50 percent of the designer's workload is from Engineering. Other users include Planning, Mobile GR, the Clerk's Office, Environmental Services, GRPD, Parks and Recreation, Executive Office, Water, Public Services, 311 (for brand identity) and Traffic Safety.

Large scale projects all come from the Planning and Engineering Departments. Other projects are quick turnaround items.

No formal protocols are in place for evaluating and prioritizing requests, and – with the exception of Engineering – no billing structure is in place to bill general fund departments for services. Engineering is billed because it is an enterprise fund.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Branding

City department personnel stated the need for a consistent and complete set of brand standards to guide visual and written communications. They welcome and request guidance in this area and suggest that the City make an investment in completing a brand standards manual and offer training on its application.

They also acknowledged that this project can only be completed and successfully implemented if City leadership prioritizes it, dedicates resources to it, institutionalizes recommendations and mandates compliance.

Design

The need for City-wide graphic design support goes hand-in-hand with the need to establish consistent brand standards.

Nearly every department representative interviewed has either called on the graphic designer for support or expressed frustration that there is no formal graphic design staff or team to provide that service. While all who have worked with the current designer had high praise for his skills, they

also acknowledged that he is stretched too thin to provide the level of service required by an organization of this size.

The City has an opportunity to take great strides toward elevating the visual quality and consistency of its brand by formalizing and resourcing City-wide graphic design services within an Office of Communications.

Section 5: Recommendations

Based on our research over the past four months, it is clear significant staffing and operational changes must be implemented to achieve the goal of effectively communicating to all residents and stakeholders in the City.

We have prepared two levels of recommendations. The first involves the establishment of an Office of Communications and a proposed organizational structure for that office. The second level addresses several key operational takeaways that the City should implement in the near future.

Organizational Structure

CITY OF GRAND RAPIDS OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS

Goal

Establish a communications staffing structure that enables the City of Grand Rapids to strategically and effectively inform and engage a diverse population and tell its story to a broad audience inside and outside the region.

Recommendation

Based on our review of the City of Grand Rapids' current communications staffing structure and practices, coupled with the clearly articulated needs of the City, we recommend the City establish and fully staff an Office of Communications to be led by a Managing Director of Communications.

The Managing Director of Communications must be an active and engaged member of the executive team.

Additionally, the office must be properly resourced. One person cannot do the job, and splitting communications functions among individuals scattered throughout the organization diminishes the

City's ability to be strategic, well-coordinated, consistent and highly effective in its external communications.

Rationale

When managing communications for everything from street closure announcements to community-police relations to transformative community-wide initiatives, the City must be strategic and consider who is most affected, how and when those audiences can most effectively be reached and what potential issues may crop up along the way.

Strategic communications is never about spin, and it's rarely achieved by offering "no comment." It's about empowering credible messengers with the right tools and messages to effectively, sensitively and authentically inform, engage and build trust among key stakeholders. That can only happen if the individual hired to lead communications has the full faith and trust of City leadership, has a consistent role in the communications decision-making process and is adequately resourced to effectively implement communications strategies.

Office Staff

We recommend that the Office of Communications be staffed as follows. While it's too early to specifically outline all job responsibilities for a Managing Director of Communications at the executive level and for the other reporting positions within the organizational structure, we have outlined some of the fundamental responsibilities of these positions. An organizational chart depicting this staff structure is provided on page 48 and provided as [Appendix K](#).

Managing Director of Communications

This executive level position reports to the City Manager and provides support and counsel to the City Commission and executive office in all communications matters related to the City of Grand Rapids. The Managing Director is responsible for leading development and implementation of a strategic communications plan that maximizes proactive communications efforts while being responsive, as needed. This communications professional will serve as the primary media spokesperson on all City-related issues, including immediate crisis response, unless a City leader or department head is designated as the spokesperson.

The Managing Director is a team leader who manages the Office of Communications staff in the implementation of the City's strategic communications plan.

The Director serves as the Office of Communications representative on the City of Grand Rapids Communications Task Force (see description, below), and leads other departments in coordinating and improving overall external communications programs. This person also works with the executive office, City Commission and staff to establish and enhance relationships and partnerships with local business and community groups.

Media Relations Manager

The Media Relations Manager will report to and work with the Managing Director of Communications to develop and implement media relations tactics that advance communications strategies in support of City Commission, executive office and departmental initiatives.

This communications professional will assist the City Commission and executive office in formulating public responses to a variety of community issues; maintain relationships with the news media and community publications; identify ways to effectively share critical information with the public through the media; work with the Managing Director of Communications and City department personnel to prepare news releases and report and disseminate information to the news media.

This person will also collaborate with other Office of Communications team members to disseminate information to community groups, businesses and other stakeholders and seek opportunities to enhance the City's image among residents and other key publics.

Community Relations Team

We recommend consolidating all current community relations functions currently housed in the Planning Department within the Office of Communications.

This includes two permanent FTEs and two temporary FTEs. Further, we recommend establishing a Community Relations Lead who will report directly to the Managing Director of Communications and who will manage the community relations team in advancing community relations strategies in

support of the City Commission, executive office and departmental initiatives. This includes project-based and issues-based community relations and neighborhood engagement.

As noted earlier, while we would ordinarily recommend that the Assistant to the City Manager – Neighborhood Coordinator and team of Neighborhood Connectors be included in this realignment, we recognize the challenges this would pose due to terms of the grant that funds their activities.

This structure would reduce redundant siloed functions, dramatically improve coordination among communications disciplines, allow the team to develop clear protocols for supporting departmental needs and more effectively advance community relations goals to:

- Build community trust, ownership and a shared vision.
- Support neighborhood engagement.
- Manage an omnipresent message.
- Be proactive rather than reactive in efforts to educate, exchange knowledge with and listen to diverse voices within the community.
- Celebrate success.
- Further the City's economic and social equity goals.

Digital Media Manager

The Digital Media Manager will oversee and guide digital strategy across all City departments, manage and update City of Grand Rapids website content and social media pages, and provide backup admin support on departmental social media pages.

Specifically, the Digital Media Manager would set up and manage the City's Master Hootsuite account, including access for departmental admins who have been trained and are responsible for managing their specific social media accounts; train and assist departmental social media admins – this includes reviewing, approving and suggesting edits to social media content; manage content generation and ensure that the Master Content Calendar is updated with that information; track

and analyze all social media performance metrics; set quarterly/yearly goals and hold admins to account.

Graphic Designer

We recommend that the current Graphic Designer in the Planning Department be brought into the Office of Communications and report to the Managing Director of Communications. Further, we recommend that the Managing Director and Graphic Designer collaborate on a plan to formalize graphic design services to City departments and establish protocols for reviewing and accommodating departmental requests.

Cable TV and A-V Administrator

We recommend that the current Cable TV Administrator (and any current support staff) be brought into the Office of Communications and report to the Managing Director of Communications. Further, we recommend that the Managing Director and Administrator collaborate on a plan to formally expand A-V services to City departments and establish protocols for reviewing and accommodating departmental requests.

By bringing this position into the Office of Communications, cable TV and A-V functions can be more fully integrated into communications strategies, leveraging the power of these tools to more effectively inform and engage the public.

Communications Specialist

This entry-level position will report to the Managing Director of Communications (or a designee/designees of the Managing Director) and support the Digital Media Manager, Graphic Designer and Cable TV and A-V Administrator, as needed. This person should possess a variety of basic communications skills including social media administration, knowledge of Adobe Creative Suite tools and the ability to provide video production support.

NOTE REGARDING GR ROSE CENTER FELLOWSHIP TEAM RECOMMENDATION:

While we wholeheartedly agree with the spirit of the Grand Rapids Rose Center Fellowship Team recommendation to establish an executive level Chief Participation Officer, we strongly recommend

that all Community Relations functions be housed within the Office of Communications, with the Managing Director of Communications filling the executive level position.

In this role, an adept and experienced communications counselor and strategist would serve as a trusted advisor to the City Commission and executive office on all Community Relations matters. Further, as head of the Office of Communications, the Managing Director would be adequately resourced to lead a team of Community Relations professionals in implementing effective strategies to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with and empower the community in a variety of City initiatives.

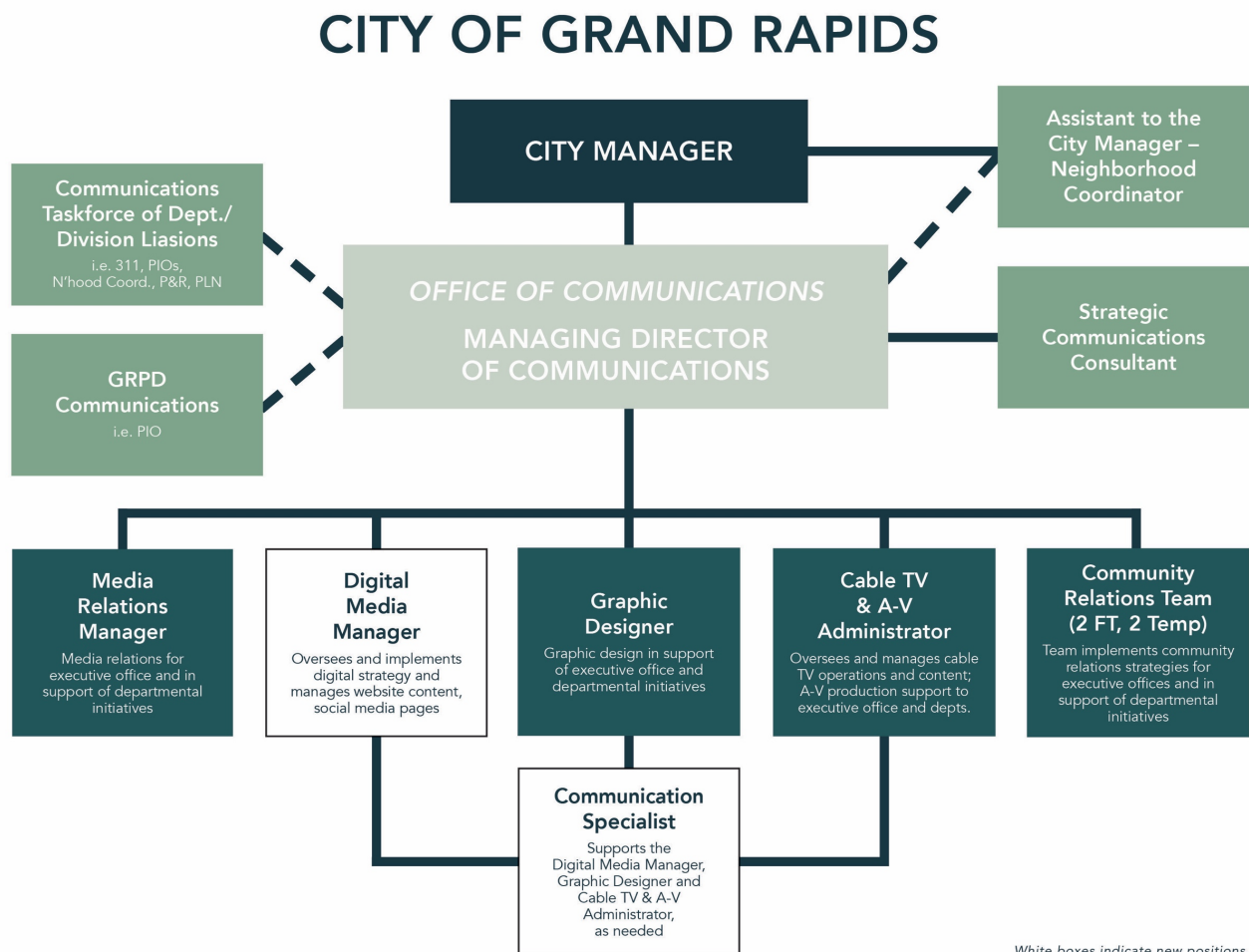
COMMUNICATIONS TASK FORCE (INTER-DEPARTMENTAL)

In addition to establishing an Office of Communications, we recommend that the City form an inter-departmental communications task force responsible for taking communications issues to the Managing Director of Communications, sharing information about priority departmental initiatives with committee members, providing input on the shared Master Content Calendar and relaying communications issues back to their respective departments or divisions.

The task force should meet regularly, i.e. weekly, and be comprised of individuals familiar with the external communications priorities and practices within their departments. Departments that frequently engage in external communications, or that support other departments in their communications activities, should be represented on the committee.

This would include but would not be limited to 311, public safety PIOs, Neighborhood Coordinator, Mobile GR, Planning, Parks and Recreation, Office of Special Events, Our Community's Children, Public Service, Traffic Safety and Water.

OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART (APPENDIX K)



White boxes indicate new positions.

Other Key Takeaways

COMMUNITY RELATIONS

- Issue all city communications in English and Spanish.
- Simplify language in announcements; avoid bureaucratic language when possible.
- Develop a monthly newsletter and calendar summarizing administrative announcements and promoting upcoming City meetings and community events.
- Provide earlier notice to community organizations and residents of City meetings in which community engagement is desired. Notices should be sent two weeks in advance.
- Engage with minority media outlets; post community development content once a month.
- Include philanthropic foundations in the distribution of relevant city information.

MEDIA RELATIONS

- Adjust procedures to facilitate the demand for rapid response messaging on unplanned media stories involving community issues, breaking news or crisis-related topics reported on by the media.
- Refine the information distribution process and establish unified protocols for all departments to follow under the guidance of the City's Managing Director of Communications.
- Develop a Master Content Calendar to prioritize the distribution of all earned media announcements by the City. This will ensure announcements are strategically positioned, are timely, relevant to the media and residents and are aligned with announcements from other departments.
- Schedule regular media background briefings to share information and strengthen relationships with key journalists and news managers.

DIGITAL MEDIA

- Refine the information distribution process and establish unified digital media protocols for all departments to follow under the guidance of the City's Managing Director of Communications.
- Consider consolidating or shutting down inactive, low engagement and off-brand social media pages (full recommendations to be provided in the Strategic Communications Plan).
- Establish a single, centralized website to serve as a hub that shares content on social media. It's our understanding that the new site, when fully launched, will serve this role.
- Develop a mobile content strategy that includes an easily accessible landing page.
- Develop a Master Content Calendar to ensure a strategic approach to content posting.

CABLE TV

- Formalize and expand A-V production services for departments.
- Upgrade A-V equipment to allow for high quality livestreaming on Facebook. If that purchase is approved, the Office of Cable TV personnel could better serve the overall visual communications needs of the City.
- Capture meeting video and upload it to digital platforms and edit it to air on GRIN.

BRANDING & DESIGN

- Invest in completing a brand standards manual to guide visual and written communications.
- Commit to brand consistency. Make it a priority; dedicate resources to ensure standards are followed; mandate compliance.

- Establish a calendar and workflow process to ensure all departments have access to graphic design support in a timely fashion.
- Establish a process in which relevant graphic design content is shared across all departments.

Section 6: Appendices

Hyperlinks to Appendices

[APPENDIX A](#) – COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROCESS & TOOLS

[APPENDIX B](#) – PARKS & RECREATION MATERIALS

[APPENDIX C](#) – COMBINED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT MAP

[APPENDIX D](#) – MEDIA RELATIONS OUTPUT SAMPLES

[APPENDIX E](#) – PROACTIVE MEDIA COVERAGE ANALYSIS

[APPENDIX F](#) – RESPONSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE ANALYSIS

[APPENDIX G-1](#) – DIGITAL MASTER QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

[APPENDIX G-2](#) – FACEBOOK AND TWITTER SUPPORTING QUANTITATIVE DATA

[APPENDIX H](#) – DIGITAL MASTER QUALITATIVE REPORT

[APPENDIX I](#) – CGR LOGO STYLEGUIDE

[APPENDIX J](#) – CGR WEBSITE STYLE/VOICE/TONE GUIDES

[APPENDIX K](#) – OFFICE OF COMMUNICATIONS ORGANIZATIONAL CHART